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THE INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL CONGRESS—  
PHILADELPHIA, OCTOBER, 1899.

There has recently been held in Philadelphia, under the auspices of the Commercial Museum, a congress unique in the history of the world,—a congress comprised of more than three hundred leading statesmen, merchants, and manufacturers, specially appointed for the purpose by every government in the world, and by the principal Chambers of Commerce in all of the principal shipping centres of the globe. The congress was called together with a double object in view:—first, to discuss, in general, commercial conditions obtaining in all parts of the world, and to make recommendations looking toward the facilitation of trade between all parts; second, to acquaint these gentlemen, all of influence and repute at home, with the industrial and commercial development of the United States; with our ability to manufacture and sell on equal terms with the other great industrial nations of the world; and with the thorough fairness and good faith in our attempts to secure business abroad.

International congresses of various descriptions have been of frequent occurrence in this age of expositions; but such gatherings have been, as a rule, principally of a scientific, literary or religious interest rather than of commercial value. The interchange of ideas by delegates of all nations has repeatedly proven to be of value in influencing the direction of subsequent thought, and the congresses held during the Paris Exposition of 1889 and the Chicago Exposition of 1893 will long be remembered for their contribution to contemporary thought. It is true that in both of these expositions, commercial congresses were held, and the same may be said of a number of other expositions of minor importance; but in each case these congresses were made up rather of theorists than of practical men. Their results have been certainly of value, but as they did not unite in themselves men of recognized leadership and influence in the countries so represented, their results have not been so widely disseminated as may perhaps have been desired or projected by their promoters. The necessity of meetings which should bring together men of this type has been peculiarly evident in the United States. Because of the great strides which have been made in recent years in our industrial and commercial development, our nation's standing and repute abroad should be everywhere placed beyond question. This necessity has long been fully realized by the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, which for several years has been actively laboring, with municipal and government support, for the extension of American trade abroad, and for devising better

facilities for foreign trading than are now at the disposal of the American manufacturers. The industries of this country have been somewhat unfortunate in that their product has not always been introduced into the foreign markets by men of sufficiently high standing, or by methods suitable to the tastes and requirements of the people whose trade has been sought. It would be manifestly unfair to make this a general statement or to cast any discredit on the magnificent efforts of a number of our leading manufacturing and commercial houses whose representatives regularly travel through all of the world's commercial centres and whose established branches are to be found actively canvassing for trade in competition with those of the best firms of England and the European Continent. It is nevertheless a fact that on the part of the larger importers in what may be called the neutral markets of the world, the excellence of the American manufactures and the character of the manufacturers themselves has not been so unquestionably established as to lead the great buying firms of those countries to extend their business in full confidence to the United States. This state of affairs has long been evident in many lines of trade in South America, and nearly three years ago the Commercial Museum of Philadelphia decided to make practical attempt to counteract this opinion. A representative of the museum made a tour of South America, visiting every important centre and carrying letters from the United States Government to its diplomatic and consular representatives. Advisory Boards and Commissions were everywhere established, and great care was exercised to choose what might fairly be termed the leading men in the commercial life of each place; the men whose favorable or unfavorable opinion might go far toward deciding the local reputation for American manufactures. These men were invited to come to the United States to take part in a Pan-American Commercial Congress, and to see for themselves the character of our industries and trade. In most cases they were men who had never before visited this country, and who had, therefore, not had an opportunity of properly judging its present condition. As a result of these invitations there was convened in Philadelphia, in June, 1897, a congress, comprising delegates from practically every American republic. The congress was in session in Philadelphia for a week, and the delegates were then taken by special train to visit other important cities of the United States, the tour including New York, Fall River, Boston, Springfield, Hartford, New Haven, Pittsburg, Dayton, Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, Grand Rapids, Detroit, Niagara, Schenectady, and returning thence to Philadelphia. In each place the local Chambers of Commerce and commercial and manufacturing organiza-

tions were combined to form reception committees. In addition to the sessions of the congress, which were held in each place, the delegates themselves were given every opportunity of inspecting the industrial and commercial establishments of the place. This congress resulted in a much better understanding on the part of American manufacturers of the conditions of doing business in Latin-American countries, and also led to a very much better opinion in this hemisphere of the character of American manufacturers and the fair intent of their dealings. The congress brought to the manufacturers of the country in the neighborhood of a million dollars' worth of immediate business and most of the connections so formed have since been continued to mutual profit and satisfaction.

The results of this Pan-American Congress were so satisfactory that preparations were immediately made for convening another meeting, which should be universal and to include delegates from every commercial nation in the world. The greatest care was exercised in the issuance of invitations and the selection of delegates. The United States Government, through the State Department, issued to every other nation in the world a formal invitation to appoint government delegates who should visit for themselves and report on the conditions at present obtaining in the United States, and the possibility of entering into reciprocal negotiations which might result in commercial benefit. This was from the first thought to be a necessary step in order not only to assist in counteracting certain fiscal and other regulations which had been made in certain countries against American staples, but to infuse into the fiscal administration of those countries a greater confidence in the provisions of our own government for the inspecting and shipment of such displays. It was also foreseen that the intended reciprocal commercial treaties might be made much easier of fulfillment if delegates from abroad, other than the accredited diplomatic representatives, were to study and report back to their various governments. Formal invitations were, therefore, as has been said, issued by the Department of State, with the result that over forty governments, including all the great nations of the world, accepted the invitation and appointed men of recognized standing to act as their representatives in the congress and to make their official reports, from which deductions will be made.

The selection of the commercial delegates was a matter of even greater importance. Commissioners from the Commercial Museum visited nearly every port in the world, special tours being made through Japan, China, the Philippines, the Straits and East Indies; India, East and South Africa, Mexico, Central and South America, Great Britain and the European Continent. The Chambers of

Commerce were visited and addressed and their support obtained for the proposed congress. The commissioners from the Museum then went over the ground personally and did their utmost to make proper selection of the men best fitted to divert trade to the United States and to secure their acceptance of the invitation to attend the congress. This consent once obtained the invitations were duly transmitted through the different Chambers of Commerce and formal credentials made out in their name.

The work of preparation for the reception of these important delegates was in the meantime being pushed forward to the fullest extent. It was necessary that every visiting merchant should see the greatest possible number of our manufactured products, but the idea of a tour like that arranged for the Pan-American Congress was abandoned as impracticable. It was therefore decided to place the information in the hands of the Delegates; and to acquaint them with our industrial development by means of an exposition in Philadelphia, which should bring together all the manufactured products best fitted for the foreign markets and which should in this way provide during the whole period of their stay in the country a constant opportunity for investigation, and choice of most desirable lines. For holding this exposition there were voted by the city of Philadelphia, the State of Pennsylvania and the United States Government and by private subscriptions, sums aggregating over a million dollars, and by the middle of September, 1899, the exposition was thrown open to the public. Space was provided aggregating nearly a million square feet and this was taken up by about 3,000 different exhibitors representing every important branch of industry in the United States. The exposition was continued until December 2, making a total of sixty-nine open days, with an average attendance exceeded by no other exposition in the United States save only the Centennial and the World's Fair. The result, financially, established a record not before attained in exposition work in the United States, the profits being sufficient to pay off every dollar of the preliminary guarantee fund and to provide a handsome return to the Commercial Museum which carried through the enterprise.

The Commercial Congress was convened on October 12, 1899, a sufficient time having been given for the entire completion of the exposition and the installation of the exhibits, and publicity due to so great an enterprise. The delegates were quartered at the best hotels in the city as guests of the municipality during their stay at the congress. An entire floor of the exposition building was set apart for the use of the congress, comprising a convention hall, with seating capacity for over a thousand, a series of reception rooms, writing

rooms, restaurant and all necessary conveniences. The sessions of the congress were held principally in this convention hall convenient to the exhibits, and social functions of every kind were frequently arranged in order to provide every possible facility for the visiting merchants and the exhibiting manufacturers to meet, exchange views and form business connections. The congress remained in daily session for three weeks, in the course of which there was much valuable and interesting discussion bearing on the trade relations of the United States with every country in the world. An efficient reception committee attended well to the amusement of the visiting delegates, providing for them receptions, smokers, theatre parties, a special trip to Atlantic City, and most important, an excursion to Washington, where the congress was officially welcomed and received in the White House by President McKinley and his cabinet.

The work of the congress was carried on in general sessions and in separate conferences composed of groups of delegates appointed to these sections according to the countries from which they were accredited. In this way minor details connected with the trade between any given countries might be fully discussed in committee and only the essential points referred to the congress at all. The work of the German-American section is deserving of particular mention. The German delegates were of a particularly high character, comprising three of the largest merchants in Berlin, a member of the union for the preparation of commercial treaties, and a number of other business men of high prominence throughout the empire. The deliberations of this section will undoubtedly lead to a more liberal policy on the part of the fiscal officials of both countries,—a consummation greatly to be desired. The work of the Australian section is commended, as well as that of the South American section.

At its final session the interest taken in the deliberations of the congress by organizations in the United States, was most gratifying, special excursions being arranged by several important societies in order that their members might have opportunity of taking part in the discussions and voting on the resolutions. The resolutions themselves, as finally passed by the congress, were of a practical nature, referring to possible means of extending trade between the United States and the rest of the world, and recommending particularly increased facilities of transportation and communication by means of an American Isthmian canal, the extension of parcels post facilities, arrangement of international trade mark and copyright facilities, arrangement of certain international custom house regulations, recommending (with strong endorsement of the British and Russian governments) the appointment of a commission to arrange for a

uniformity in the gathering of commercial and agricultural statistics in all countries of the world, etc. The complete proceedings of the congress, with resolutions passed and all discussions thereon, have been printed and may be obtained, on application, from the Philadelphia Commercial Museum.

The results of the congress are far reaching in their nature and are certain to be long felt in the commercial development of the country. In the way of immediate business a vast amount of orders was secured during the exposition, aggregating between two and three millions of dollars, and the connections formed during that period are certain to result in increasing business as the years go by. The delegates in the congress, as has been said, were men of the highest standing in their respective localities, and the trade which has been, and will be, built up through their visit here can hardly be estimated at the present time. It is but the beginning of a movement which will gather force and importance with each succeeding year.

The educational influence of the congress on manufacturers and merchants in the United States has been, and will be, of great importance. It is a fact that the foreign trade of this country has been largely incidental in its development, but few houses having devoted their efforts solely to that branch of business, with the result that the trade has been too often uncertain, fluctuating and unsatisfactory to all parties concerned. The importance of a steady foreign market as providing an outlet for the surplus product of the country has until within the last year or two been almost entirely unrecognized by the very men and firms to whom it would seem to be of the most vital importance. The conditions of trade obtaining in foreign markets have not been generally appreciated; the methods of doing business are either unknown or unapproved, and as a natural consequence the merchant in other countries too often is obliged to place his orders with English or European exporters, because of the unwillingness or inability of the American competitors to realize his position or to meet him on the same terms which he is accustomed to receiving from those with whom he is now doing business. The effect of a visit on the part of influential merchants from foreign countries, who have themselves been in a position to explain to our manufacturers and shippers the conditions of their business and the necessity of our meeting them at least half way if we expect to secure their trade, is bound to lead to a better mutual understanding and a consequent increase in trade. The converse of this position is equally true. The conditions in this country have not been realized abroad, and the foreign merchant does not realize that the terms offered him by American houses, while apparently more severe, actually mean a quicker delivery and a

cheaper turnover in the long run. This mutual understanding, for understanding it is, and will be so reported in every country in the world, will have its lasting effect in American commercial expansion.

The influence of such congresses on public opinion and legislation is self-evident and no emphasis can be too great on the value of infusing a leaven of knowledge of this sort into the deliberations of our legislative bodies. The time has passed when the United States can be considered as a nation sufficient unto itself and independent of its fellows in either its political or commercial development. It has its place in the world like all the rest, and is, like every other great nation, feeling the effects of its own immense productive capacity in a way which forces it to enter the world's markets as a competitor for business. The results of this tendency have so far been almost uniformly in favor of the American production, and what has been done is but a very slight indication of what may be expected in the future. It remains for the people and for the people's legislators to be impressed continually with the fact that the present economic conditions are not temporary, but are one important phase of an evolution which has been under way for years and which will continue on its course, moulding the policies and activities of the country into forms hardly dreamed of by the nation's founders, and but faintly foreshadowed in contemporary thought. America is to-day the greatest producing nation in the world. Its consuming capacity is relatively greater than any other nation, but does not prevent the increasing necessity of its becoming equally the greatest commercial nation. The International Commercial Congress just held in Philadelphia is but a slight indication of a great national evolution.

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